

<b>Topic</b>	Church as a Counselling Community
<b>Reference</b>	Matthew 26:36-46
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Lets just say after this service everybody leaves and there is one person sitting behind. What will you do? If we are honest with ourselves, majority of us don't do anything. Now I would like to propose, it is not because we don't care, it is because you don't know what to do. But when someone does this and they do this you will be surprised more often than you think. It is because they are struggling with some issues. So today, I want to take a difficult topic, we rarely talk about but I think it is important and after this morning's first service I am very convinced we really got to talk about it. I would like to talk generally about issues of loneliness, depression and anxiety. Because they are far more prevalent in the church then we recognize.

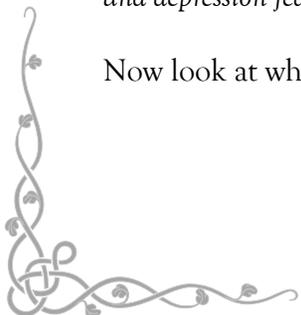
Let me give you some history, during my time Britney Spears was the first 17-year-old girl to hit the Billboards, but I want to tell you how the world has shifted. Do you think if Britney Spears, today if she was 17 years old, did this, do you think she will get anywhere near the Top Ten. I will tell you no. I just want to prove to you a point how the world has shifted. 17-year-old nowadays who hit the topic of the charts don't look like this, they look like Billie Eilish. She suffers from Tourette's syndrome, very open about it. She is now the world's top 17-year-old selling star. Do you know what is the title of the latest single, good girls go to hell.

Now I asked my daughter, what is wrong with your generation? She said, no we are being real. Now I wanted to just follow the flow. If this generation reboots anything from the past, it has got to be dark. 13 reasons why which is about a suicide among young people is in its third season and the latest movie points to poise to break the blockbuster is about a madman. This is the world of your teenagers and to prove a point if you look at the data, anything from the world economic forum, from any known research pew, they will tell you generation Z and millennials are the most depressed in human history. That's the contradiction. A generation that doesn't understand war or starvation is the most depressed. Now again lets up the stakes and I will tell you why this is so serious.

Jared Wilson suffers from depression, openly declares it, associate pastor in a large church, runs the mental health ministry, one of the few pastors that Justin Bieber connects to. Sometime this year he took his life. He is not the first pastor, he follows in the footsteps of another pastor called Andrew Stocklein who also took his life. So I want to suggest you, this issue is much more pandemic then we imagine and when you read what their wives write, you notice they are similar. Let me just read it to you from Jared's widow,

*My loving, giving, kind-hearted, encouraging, handsome, hilarious, give the shirt of his back husband went to be with Jesus late last night. No more pain, my jerry, no more struggle. You are made complete and you are finally free. Suicide and depression fed you the worst lies, but you knew the truth of Jesus and I know you're by his side right this very second.*

Now look at what Andrew's wife wrote,



*“Last night, the love of my life, the father of my children and the pastor of our incredible church took his last breath and went to be with Jesus. It wasn’t the miracle I was hoping for but he is now in Heaven with his dad, free of pain, free of depression and anxiety.” Kayla Stocklein*

These are pastors. So this issue permeates us and I want to take this morning through this heavy topic but we do need to discuss about this and I am not trying to discuss this from a clinical point of view, I don’t have the expertise but I do want to see what scripture says about this and it is a major theme in the Bible and church history.

*“My spirits were sunken so low that I could weep by the hour like a child, and yet I knew not what I wept for”*

Charles Spurgeon said this. This Prince of Preachers suffered from depression.

*“Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?” Psalm 42.5*

These sort of people are in our midst, but they will not tell you. They will not talk about it. They will not open up. So I want to just start off with a simple proposition. The proposition will be, what would Jesus do? And let us use it as our text and we will look at the garden of Gethsemane where Jesus was lonely, when Jesus was anxious, when Jesus was depressed and what he did and we see whether we can as a church learn something from this.

Let me give you four points

- ▶ Talk about it.
- ▶ The church as a comforting and supporting community.
- ▶ Are you spiritually slumbering?
- ▶ Learning to live “your will be done” daily.

The verse starts, after the Passover at the Mount of Olives, 12 disciples walk to the Mount of Olives and then Jesus pulls three of them aside,

*<sup>37</sup>He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. <sup>38</sup>Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.”*

When was the last time you told someone, “I am depressed, I am anxious or I am struggling with this or that”. We don’t do that, we have this stigma in church, don’t talk about it and that’s my fundamental point I want to pick up. So people come to church with issues, they don’t want to talk about it and the text will tell you why because the disciples failed. Let me just explain a little bit of, if you read it, try not to psychoanalyze it too much but you can understand the degree of it. The Luke text says,

*<sup>44</sup>And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.*  
 Luke 22:44

I know people who go through life normal, happy and then suddenly on a day just shut off. One of the brothers whom I am very close with, one of the spiritual pillars who I know for years confided to me recently, after three years of knowing me that he had depression and he will tell me, he will wake up in the morning, he just feel very down, he will close the curtains of his room, make sure the wife and everyone has left and then he will binge watch YouTube. He will watch the whole day. At the end of the day he goes into what is known as FOMO, which means fear of missing out. That's a syndrome that you go through and then he will feel lousy about himself and then compares with everyone. This is a guy who knows his Bible at the back of his head, who runs classes to encourage people, who taught me many things and I say brother, you struggle with this and he said yes.

So it is a real issue and we need to deal with this and the starting point is very simple, it is not rocket science, talk about it. Now how do we talk about it, who do we talk about it that's a different story but we need to talk about it. Now, why do we not talk about it? So lets go to some illustrations. Storm troopers appear in the Star Wars mythology. They are the soldiers of the empire and now the first order. If you don't understand Star Wars mythology, what is the purpose of storm troopers and there are legions and legions of storm troopers. The role of storm troopers are to be shot. They cant aim straight, they die like flies.

The role of storm troopers is a mindless representation of a community. A community that thinks the same way, looks the same way, is expected to be that way. That's what it is. Now why is this interesting, because in six movies they portrayed the storm trooper, until the seventh movie, suddenly the mindless storm troopers have faith, suddenly they took off their mask and we need that menacing mask was a scared person. It says a lot, it is a narrative. There is a Japanese term, Honne and Tatemaie. Honne is what I think, Tatemaie is what I say. In Japanese culture which is very much like a storm trooper culture, because the society is supposed to be perform in a certain way as oppose to Western society which is very individualistic. In Japanese society, what you think is not important, you keep it to yourself, whats important is Tatemaie, you behave in what is expected of you in your culture. Now doesn't that tell you of our church. Come to church I am supposed to worship happy because every one is happy, I go to Bible study, I am supposed to contribute to Bible, I am supposed to behave a certain because I am in FBC, so I put on a mask. So this illustration is powerful.

Now the question you ask is, how do you get people to move the mask. The movie has a powerful analogy. He gets shaken out when he sees blood. The blood of a death shakes him and the blood of the lamb. The blood of our savior who did not have a mask, who told his disciples he was sorrowful to the point of death, who died humbly, who died a death most disgraceful, is telling you the church is not a place for mask, let's start talking. What kind of mask do we have. Let me give you few:

1. Dark Vader, some of us are like that. We want to be strong. We hide behind our Bible knowledge, we hide behind the fact that we, we want to seen to be very capable but when you remove the mask you see years of anguish and pain.
2. Some of wear mask because we want to be somebody else. We see someone else like that and we want to follow. We think if we would be like that we will be happy, but underneath that mask is a very conflicted person.

We all wear masks. Depression and anxiety is not a matter of choice. We have to bring this to the church to recognize some people struggle with this. Sometimes the circumstances; David, Elijah, Jeremiah, Jonah,

Job, all suffered from this, even Paul suffered from it in 2-Corinthians, but the church likes to tell people, you are depressed because of your actions, you must have done something wrong and some people have disorders and the church needs to embrace this and we need to destigmatize this, so that people come to church, they don't feel like they are being targeted if they open up. They don't feel like they need to chill up and put up a mask because I suggest to you that's unbiblical. Scripture is telling us clearly, that's not how a church functions.

There are two extreme positions; one is go see a therapist. The medicine is going to give you serotonin reuptake inhibitors, it helps your serotonin level, nothing to do with the church. Another one which is what the Christians like to do is spiritualize it, you must have sin, you must have done something wrong. Christians love to give opinions and because of that stigma people shut off. They don't want people to look at them and say there is something wrong with you, that's a signing point. So those that hurt needs three groups of support and today I want to look at peer support because peer support involves every single one of you in this room. So how do we do that, you do that as a church and what does the church do, you say I don't know the Bible, I can't give counseling, no need. You only need to do two things, you need to comfort and support and everyone in this room can do that. We have to stop this stigma and bring the power of the church upon those that hurt in our midst.

Now what's interesting about the text is that, Jesus declared his anguish to three people only. It is an important point of distinction and the way the verse goes, the background is 12 people went to Gethsemane. Out of the 12 he pulled 3 aside and only with the three he opened up. That's the template. No one is asking you to take a megaphone and tell the whole world, I have a problem, we get it but you have to open up to a few people. In Jesus's case it was the three closest people he had, Peter and the sons of Zebedee. Now let me give you an example, how this works.

This individual comes to the first service, I had permission to bring up her story. She has demanded I remove her picture from the slides and I will do so. You don't come to church and tell people you have got problem, because sometimes people don't know how to react but what you don't do is come to church with a mask. No one is asking you to declare but be real. So she came one day for a meeting and she was very downcast and the meeting was only a few people and she said I couldn't go on and Pastor Leon was there. Pastor Leon went to his car, pulled out his guitar and then he played to her. After that Pastor Joash sat there, didn't know what to do, also went away, came back with another guitar and both of them played the guitar. Pastor Ling who sat there who didn't have a guitar waited for them to finish playing and then he prayed. That's three people. That's what Jesus is teaching us. And all it ask is for you not to put on a smile if you don't feel like smiling. Some times I ask people how are they, they say I am fine and you know they are not fine, but you see they are stuck, they can't tell you, I am not okay because Arnold I don't know you, I don't want to tell you my problems, so we are jam. But I think scripture does start off with this. you have got to find a small community that does do these things, they comfort and they support. No one is asking you to preach, no one is asking you to give fancy advice, you just need to comfort, you need to support.

This is the pyramid we use. We tend to use this in discipleship. What we forget, discipleship often involves looking after people when they are down. So Larry Krapp looks at it this way, you start from a huge group, communal empathy, that's all of you here, then it goes to a smaller group that's the live group and then it goes to the third level, that's the three people. This is the three-tier approach of community support. The

first one is this. So here is my struggle with second service people. If I have an issue with anxiety and depression and I sit there, I know I should talk to somebody, I am not going to make the first move, you know what helps me to make the first move. It helps me if after the service I say, hey if anyone got problem come in front, a lot of people come. If a lot of people come, I hide in the crowd, dare not go to Arnold and say can you pray for me.

Here is what if I can give you a loving rebuke, the tragedy is that this does not happen in second service. I hope I am wrong but if I do it end of today you will just stare at me again. So we need to find something else, maybe you are not ready. This is where anonymity is important. Because if I have a issue, if I got marriage problem, I will probably go to someone outside. I won't go from the church because of stigma, level 1. Level 2 is the live group. The live group is where you begin to learn some of these issues and the skills. So here is a thing, in your group, you are having this profound bible study, are you able to pick up body language of people who are going through problems. That's the role of the Bible study leader. You give me a profound thought, the guy just had a bad day at work, he doesn't want to hear you, he wants you to love him and support him and a lot of this requires hearing skill. So I want to really encourage especially the leaders to come to Gamma. Because listening skills is two part; verbal and nonverbal listening. And so the live groups becomes more connected.

The third of course is when you go to a small group with few people. Let me just go through some other issues; Are you spiritually slumbering? Jesus gave one commandment to the three of them, stay here and keep watch with me. Then later he tells them to pray. But praying diligently and keeping watch and they sleep. Three times the text is saying, they sleep. Why do they sleep

<sup>45</sup> *When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, **exhausted from sorrow.***  
Luke 22:45

So here is a reality check. When you and I have a problem and issue at home, at work, in my health, that issue so surrounds me, it becomes the lenses in which I see every issue in my life. I can't think straight, because the issue so covers me, I view life through those issues and that's what the text is saying. The sorrow exhaust you and when the sorrow exhausts you, you are not awake and all commentators have picked up, the text is not so much about physical sleeping but is a metaphor for spiritual slumber. So spiritual slumber comes about because you don't know yourself as much as you think you do. Spurgeon says this

*"In the long run, we will do more by sometimes doing less"* ( Charles Spurgeon, [Lectures to My Students](#), 128).

The church now is run by a handful of people that goes on overdrive because Peter goes on overdrive. So here is the honesty and then they expect a few people to go on overdrive. I run my own business. So when people come and tell me, they have no time, I tell them if you have no time I have no time, because I am as busy as you are. I am a father, I am a husband, I run my own business, I sign checks on Monday because it is salary day, I lobby for work, I look at HR, I bring in projects, it is not easy but here is the dichotomy of the church, the church runs by expecting a few people to go on overdrive, the rest don't do much. What happens long term. Long term is bad for both sides.

People like us burn out, people like you don't get involved and what the church wants is to spread the community out. That is what Jesus is saying. You take a bit more of my work, I then am not tempted to put on a mask when I feel burn out and come on Sunday and people say, can you pray for me and I feel rotten. The lesson you learn from the suicide of pastor is that, when you are in leadership you feel you have to put on a mask. So if you don't want your leaders to burn out, everybody takes the load. Here is the way spiritual stumble goes to whom. Now let me just take a little bit on the parenting issue.

Slumber means you are not aware of certain things. People say selfie is a small matter, why you make a big deal. For all the uninitiated parents, let me tell you what selfie is, you post it and you want people to like it. If they don't your dopamine level goes down. It is the need for approval. And I think parents, if you don't mind me saying, a lot of us are not judging anyone can be quite unaware of what is going on, what happens in our kids and we don't see signs like the disciples we are not awake. When they fall, Jesus makes indictment on them,

<sup>41</sup> *"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."*

The temptation is specific

<sup>35</sup> *But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same.*

Peter falls into temptation. Before the end of the night, he would disown. That's a specific temptation. You think you are strong but you not. Do you know why people don't open up to people in church, because Christians sometimes can be the most judgmental people on the face of earth. Not only judgmental we have got an opinion on everything. The church is very famous for unsolicited opinions. So no wonder people don't open up. They don't open up simply because we show absolutely no empathy and I will tell you in the issue of homosexuality, that's the biggest area. We all don't know our limits.

We say a lot of things and we don't realize our words break people. There is an old saying, you don't break the wings of a bird if you want the bird to fly and you break the wings. Recently we have a suicide prevention workshop among the leaders, packed and we had a therapist come and teach us and the therapist works with young people. Do you know what is the number one thing you don't tell young people when they are struggling with issues;

- "During my time...." Because this saying has no empathy
- "I told you so ...."
- "Just do this...."
- "It's not so bad..."
- "Are there any secret sins you are hiding?"

Sometimes we are so disconnected and that's why people are stigmatized. People don't want to talk because they don't feel we empathize. We don't walk with people. Jesus tells you a simple thing, just comfort, just support, be aware, that's enough. Job's friends were doing great until they open their mouths.

Learning to live 'your will be done' daily.

This is probably the key text because I got this from someone who went through such darkness and she explained to me how she went through it. She was at the first service. There is three cycles of prayer and the prayers repeat themselves. The prayer is all the same,

<sup>39</sup> *Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”*

Now that is very telling because you are talking about the humanity of Jesus versus his divinity. This is God, feeding 5 thousand, raising the dead, he is having second thoughts. That’s what the text is saying. Jesus is having second thoughts and the text is telling you that is not wrong. Why, because he \_\_\_ if it is possible, not my will but as your will. Now that says a lot about what goes through us when we are going through depression because he is depressed. He is having anxiety. It is telling you two things: He is telling you there are two voices, one is my will and another one is the father’s will. Now what is quite interesting. When we go to verse 42, the light shifts a bit. It is no longer if it is possible, it is

<sup>42</sup> *He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”*

So there is a bit of alignment away from this but there is still that tension. So here is the question that I ask you, what is your cup. You all have cups. It could be financial, relational, health, whatever and the text is telling us, if the son of man can oscillate so will we and the text is telling us, you focus less on the bitterness of the cup but more on the giver of the cup. It means this, if you are going through a turmoil, you have to declare to God your will and then you have to put God’s will there and recognize that is an oscillation. You ask God this is how you really feel, I want my marriage to work, but God I don’t know if it goes away your will be done. That I think is the fundamental basis and the more we do it, three cycles of prayer, the number of three is significant scripture, all of this means it is a effort. You keep doing it. You move from bitterness of the cup. You concentrate more on the giver of the cup.

In Pilgrim’s Progress, the pilgrim tries to go up the hill and he is focused on the city of God but along the way there is distraction, temptation comes, depression comes, anxiety comes and the text is telling us, keep focus. As you keep focus, the journey becomes easier.